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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on the findings from a collaborative research journey with two groups of primary school teachers and principals within a context of curriculum change in Hong Kong. The purpose of the paper is an invitation to stakeholders to reflect and act upon the findings that can have an impact on reconstructing teachers' work at various learning sites and at the policymaking level. The emphasis of the study was on critiquing and reconstructing teachers' curriculum work from an inside-out perspective within a context of curriculum change. The research performed in the study was embedded in local and international changing contexts, and was conceptualized with reference to western and eastern literature. Two research strategies, narrative and conversation, were used as navigational tools to engage participants in critical reflection collaboration, communication, and transformation. Teachers' stories were the foci of hermeneutic interpretation and thematic analysis. Transparency and ethical considerations were emphasized throughout the research described in the paper. Attributes of this type of study are also discussed. (Author/AA)

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Is it possible within a context of curriculum change?

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Value the 'unvalued': Is it possible within a context of curriculum change?

Marianne Koo

Abstract

The paper draws on the "findings" from a collaborative research journey with two groups of primary school teachers and principals within a context of curriculum change in Hong Kong. The purpose of this paper is an invitation to stakeholders to reflect and act upon the findings that can have an impact on reconstructing teachers' work at various learning sites and at a policy-making level.

The collaborative research journey began due to the researcher's doctoral studies. The emphasis was to critique and reconstruct teachers' curriculum work from an inside-out perspective within a context of curriculum change. The paper was developed from a research problem:

At a systemic level, teachers are:

- marginalised from authentic curriculum change from an inside-out perspective since policy-makers hold separate views about preferrable ways of engaging teachers in changing their curriculum work at various learning sites;
- asked to implement curriculum decisions (which include goals, content, assessment and evaluation) which are set by outside experts; and
- expected to accept reforms that are considered desirable by the central agencies.

The research study was embedded in local and international changing contexts, and conceptualized with reference to western and eastern literature. Two research strategies, narrative and conversation, were used as navigational tools to engage participants in critical reflection, collaboration, communication and transformation. Teachers' stories were the foci of hermeneutic interpretation and thematic analysis. Transparency and ethical considerations were emphasized throughout the research journey.

Because of the passion and responsibility of using an Action Research approach, the researcher has already presented eight papers in local and international conferences about the purpose, process and outcome of the study. Based on the findings, the paper identifies some attributes of how this sort of study can be valid and valuable in research communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks to two Critical Friends, ten teachers and the principals of two primary schools who allowed me to work with them in this research study. I was particularly impressed by the interviews that provided spaces for listening to the teachers. The group meetings with teachers and the principal at each school were also challenging, inspiring and delightful.

I. Introduction

This paper summarises briefly what the researcher did; explains why it is significant in terms of having an impact on the investigation of curriculum issues and problems; and what the research study can lead to as thinking about the usefulness of the research approach.

There were altogether eight papers presented in local and international conferences since the study was conceptualized as a research proposal for my doctoral studies. They were in order as: *Action Research as a collaborative journey navigated by school teachers and university researchers: A feasible and prominent future within a context of curriculum change in Hong Kong* (February 1999, paper presented at the International Conference on Teacher Education, Hong Kong); *Stories we need to know, voices we want to echo: Teacher curriculum decision-making within a context of curriculum change in Hong Kong* (April 1999, paper presented at the Annual Conference on Teacher Research, Canada); *We care, we share and we are committed: A researcher's ongoing journey of reflection and empowerment* (October 1999, paper presented at the ~~Annual~~ Biennial Conference ~~on Childhood Education International, U.S.~~ of Australian Curriculum Studies Association, Australia); *Teachers' stories: A collaborative journey of reflection and empowerment* (April 2000, paper presented at the Annual Conference on Childhood Education International, U.S.); *"Who am I": Teachers' stories at a time of curriculum change* (April 2000, paper presented at the Annual Conference on Teacher Research, U.S.); *Choose to choose for educational research: Moving towards an optimistic future or a dead end?* (December 2000, paper presented at the Conference, Association for Australian Research in Education, Australia); *The way ahead: Which road should we choose?* (September 2001, paper presented at the Biennial Conference of Australian Curriculum Studies Association, Australia); *A researcher's agony: Five moments in the collaborative research journey* (December 2001, paper presented at the Conference, Association for Australian Research in Education, Australia). In addition to this conference paper, audiences/readers are suggested to further review the above-mentioned eight papers in order to gain a full picture of reporting the study.

Having said this, the summary of what I (as the researcher) did, what I have found, why the

research study is significant and what it can lead to enables me to extend theory, improve practice and inform policy about teacher curriculum decision-making. I will concentrate on discussing the knowledge I have gained from this study, the usefulness of the research approach and the implications for supporting teachers in coping with curriculum change. It is on this basis as an argument for responding to the title of the paper as "Value the 'unvalued': Is it possible within a context of curriculum change?".

II. Summarising the study

The focus of my doctoral studies was teacher curriculum decision-making within a context of curriculum change in Hong Kong. The study involved critical inquiry using narratives from and conversations with ten teachers and two principals of School 1 and School 2. I (as the researcher) identified the research problem and set the research question for investigation. The purposes and the significance of the study were made clear. The study was conceptualised mainly within the academic domains of curriculum studies and teacher education. The review of literature provided a summary of the themes relevant to the study. Emerging ideas were derived from the themes of curriculum theorizing, teacher curriculum decision-making, curriculum change and teacher professional development. These ideas were manifest in curriculum change strategies for empowerment and transformative practices. The conceptual framework for investigating teacher curriculum decision-making within a context of curriculum change was underpinned by notions such as negotiation, communication, collaboration, participation and ownership, critical reflection, reconstructive action, professional learning and teacher empowerment. Positioning teachers and principals in the center, an inter-relatedness of critical reflection, reconstructive action, professional learning and empowerment reflected the four themes derived from the literature. Within a changing curriculum context, these four themes together displayed a revolving momentum that resulted in several sets of emerging ideas. The actions emerging out of the inner space throughout the four Action Steps in the research study created a flow of ideas. These were advanced by negotiation, communication, collaboration, participation and ownership. Such a conceptual framework captured possibilities for creating spaces for new ideas or concepts or propositions generated by the study, and responded positively and constructively to a changing curriculum context.

It was contextualised within the implementation of curriculum change as introduced by the Target-Oriented Curriculum (TOC). Limitations and delimitations of the study were thoroughly considered. The data collection period began in late 1998 and was completed in July 2000. The research study used an Action Research approach as critical, collaborative and

recursive. The four Action Steps were designed to create wave motions within the research activities for transformation and reconstruction (Koo, 2001a). Instead of claiming validity for this study, *trustworthiness* in terms of *appropriateness*, *authenticity* and *truth* was used as an overarching criterion within the methodological framework. All this was committed to the principles of ethics and transparency in conducting human research. The participants member-checked and signed all the meeting notes. Before each research meeting, all the participants received a letter about the arrangement details.

The use of research strategies and the design of research activities within the four Action Steps demonstrated my sincere collaboration with the front-line teachers and the principals from School 1 and School 2. I was careful to maintain a caring and trusting relationship with the participants for the authentication of data in the study. The data collected by narratives and ensuing conversations addressed the thinking and action of teacher curriculum decision-making both individually and collectively. The teachers' stories provided a platform for the participants to work as a group for ongoing critique and reconstruction of teachers' curriculum work.

The "findings" from the study corresponded to the three parts of the research question which included the lifeworld perspectives of ten primary school teachers and two principals in Hong Kong about teacher curriculum decision-making, the reasons for this critical inquiry and some possible implications for teacher and principal professional development. Accordingly, I have identified the research outcomes of the study as the place, readiness and potential of teachers in curriculum decision-making (Koo, 2001b). Conceptually and contextually, the interactions of *people*, *context* and *curriculum* together display a three-dimensional space which opens up new possibilities for people involved in envisioning and enacting teacher curriculum decision-making as both the means and ends leading to new conceptions and practices of curriculum leadership. *People* (as major stakeholders) and *context* (as both micro and macro-social and political contexts) unite in a surface plane in an ongoing critique and transformation of teachers' curriculum work. *People* and *curriculum* together are symbolic of the intimacy of knowledge of and action in teacher curriculum decision-making. The interface of *curriculum* and *context* becomes a shared phenomenon of curriculum issues and challenges in highlight. More importantly, *hope*, *trust* and *support* generate momentum to keep this three-dimensional space dynamic, evolving and sustainable.

Three main strategies are therefore necessary. They are retiming, reculturing and restructuring; which address the limitations of the people, context and curriculum theories and practices within a context of curriculum change on the one hand, while delimiting the boundaries of these factors within traditional school cultures by transformation and reconstruction. These

three strategies are applicable to the contexts in both basic education and teacher education in order to extend the potential of teachers in curriculum decision-making.

In view of the above, the study may have some implications for teacher and principal professional development. Broadly speaking, in-service teacher education programs should be context-specific. Both pre-service and in-service programs need to celebrate student learning as knowledge-in-action for emancipatory interest. Since the teacher education programs are largely offered for the undergraduate and postgraduate levels at the local universities and a teacher education institution, the philosophy of these course programs should be linked to the ethos of university education. According to Max Weber, the legacy of enlightenment is actually the victory of instrumental rationality (Kam, 2000, p.30). In this sense, technical and practical interests of knowledge might only serve the need of teachers being implementors, adopters or adaptors within the context of curriculum change. In order to challenge the taken-for-granted role of teachers as implementors, the planning, implementation and evaluation of teacher education programs should consider moving away from "an enlightenment mentality" toward the thinking and action of "transformation and reconstruction". By the same token, university academics and teacher educators must be aware that their images of curriculum, curriculum theorizing and curriculum change are important ingredients in implementing those three strategies – retiming, reculturing and restructuring – for enhancing the effectiveness of teacher and principal professional learning.

The ways in which I critically examine the data are useful in seeking to understand the diversity across and within teaching or learning sites where teachers engage in curriculum making. It appears that the centrality of teachers in curriculum making does have a role in global education of the 21st Century when knowledge production is regarded as the key of success to individual societies.

Based on these "findings", it is significant to note teacher professionalism in terms of enhancing the effectiveness of teaching and learning, and critical reflection that contributed to teachers' inner desires for transformation and reconstruction. It was this focus that permeated participants' discussions throughout the Action Steps 3 and 4 for taking conversations and reconstruction into action. The thematic analysis indicated that the practice of teacher curriculum decision-making was affected by inherited power and interpersonal relationships within education systems and school settings because authentic teacher participation, ownership and communication were troubled by bureacratisation, impersonalism and alienation as a result of school hierarchy and the policy rhetoric. It is reasonable to say that any educational research and professional learning which raised critical consciousness of knowledge, power and social justice would lead to a certain degree of teacher resistance to the

curriculum control imposed by the government agencies within the context of curriculum change.

There is no doubt that personal and professional values embedded in the cultural and social context constituted the lifeworld perspectives of teachers and principals about teacher curriculum decision-making. Some enduring values of Chinese education, mainly *caring*, *love*, *respect* and *justice*, were evident in the study to justify the place of teacher curriculum decision-making. This is indeed an extraordinary finding of the study because those deep-rooted Chinese values re-emerged from the curriculum context of transformation and reconstruction within which teacher curriculum decision-making was seen as a fairly "western" mode of democratic thinking and action in the minds of participants and two Critical Friends. The teachers' stories were a powerful source of collective evidence in search of self-identity in the midst of curriculum change. The teachers and principals of School 1 and School 2 responded to the question of "who am I" with regard to the role conflicts they had in being told to be curriculum implementers, adopters or adapters. Front-line teachers actually experienced an identity crisis in curriculum formulation, planning, implementation and evaluation at various learning sites when policy initiatives were imposed from the top-down. Advocacy of teacher curriculum decision-making may better cope with the dilemmas and tensions of "either-or" while positioning teachers in their curriculum work. Teacher curriculum decision-making covers the notion of "both-and" for developing a sense of satisfaction and challenge in curriculum actions. In fact it can be argued that it is *both* the central role *and* the self-identity of professional teachers that teacher curriculum decision-making be legitimate, developing a sense of empowerment from an inside-out perspective.

It is also important to note that teacher curriculum decision-making has to do with ethical and professional responsibilities to students in consideration of the process of teaching and the selection of content. It would, however, be wrong to assume that these values and responsibilities alone are enough to legitimise or sustain the practice of teacher curriculum decision-making. Apart from this, the lifeworld perspectives of teachers and principals about teacher curriculum decision-making also included the search for and the establishment of professional authority and curriculum identity in positioning teachers within new social relations and working partnerships at a time of curriculum change. The notion of "shared decision-making and shared responsibility" from a professional team perspective contributes to generate this ongoing search in the lived experiences of teachers and principals. On the one hand, the establishment of professional authority implies the need for evidentiary warrant, accountability warrant and political warrant (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001) in teacher education. On the other hand, the search for curriculum identity appears to be important when

the potential of teachers in curriculum decision-making includes *people*, *context* and *curriculum* that may create new possibilities for crossing borders and exploring new frontiers in teachers' curriculum work. It is likely that curriculum identity will be seen as an authentic and legitimate claim for "curriculum" in various subject disciplines and domain knowledge of school programs. It is at this point that curriculum identity may link to the thinking and action of teacher leadership by a transformative perspective – a possible image of *curriculum leadership* within the context of curriculum change. In view of the above, the lived experiences of teachers in curriculum leadership will be worthwhile in in-depth cross-cultural curriculum inquiry.

The "findings" of this study reveal the importance of teacher education programs offered at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels and due consideration should be given to the overarching purposes of university education. It is clear that the primary quality of teacher education is seen as career training for teachers at all levels, through either a pre-service or an in-service mode of learning. It is common for the course programs to consider the practical and technical interest of the teaching profession. The second quality of teacher education, which is within the ethos of university education, however, is the emphasis of intellectual integrity on knowledge production, civic contribution to society, and virtue as grace. Lao (2000) annotates the classics of Daxue (The Great Learning), one of the Four Books in ancient China, and quotes Confucius. "大學之道，在明明德，在親(新)民，在止於至善" (p.3). The dichotomy of these two basic qualities may lead to the effect of reductionism in achieving the main goals of teacher education at a university level.

The validated account of how ten teachers and two principals participated in this collaborative research journey is thus a useful base for advocating teacher curriculum decision-making in ongoing teacher and principal professional development programs. The recognition of teachers who are central to curriculum making and the emerging need for curriculum identity call teacher educators' attention to the critical intent and emancipatory interest of knowledge in university education. In this light, curriculum studies should be clearly and visibly defined and taught in pre-service and in-service teacher professional development programs. There is much to understand about how teacher educators define curriculum; how we conceptualise curriculum studies in higher education and how we structure and teach programs accordingly. What appears to be fairly important for teacher educators is to develop a position paper or a rationale for teaching curriculum studies, a knowledge base for curriculum studies and a structure for curriculum studies. It is also essential for teacher educators to articulate how teaching and learning curriculum studies can relate to new possibilities for research partnerships with schools. A strong reason for "a new life" of curriculum studies in teacher education programs is to reject the image of "ivory tower" and "service station" in higher

education. This might be achieved by providing local research "findings" with reference to curriculum theorising, curriculum change and teacher and principal professional development. Apparently, this Action Research approach as critical, collaborative and recursive is able to provide evidence for (re)creating places and spaces for curriculum studies in teacher education programs since the participants indicated that there was a wide gap between the educational theories and the school practice. All participants agreed that this study was one the likes of which they had never experienced, discovering and creating space for their voices within a view that teacher curriculum decision-making was explored both critically and reconstructively with front-line practitioners through ongoing professional discourse.

It is now evident for me (as the researcher) to say that teacher educators *must* narrow the gap between theory and practice, and blur the boundaries of knowledge and action. It is a matter of urgency, too. Curriculum studies, as praxis-oriented, is expected to provide the bridge between the various disciplines of education foundation and also between these disciplines and practicum. Attempting to fulfill this role is, of course, an enormous challenge to teacher educators involved in program planning and course implementation. Alongside this challenge is the need for teacher educators (as researchers) to understand how systems view both teacher curriculum decision-making and teachers in curriculum leadership in order to gain credibility from the public and professional bodies.

In summary, there are two main "findings" from the study. Firstly, teacher curriculum decision-making *can be* a warrant for teacher professionalism and curriculum identity in school programs. A warrant here means the provision of evidence or the demonstration of accountability considerations, not for the private interest but for the public good. Secondly, enduring values of education, mainly caring, love, respect and justice, engage teachers in their curriculum work with heart and mind and continually infuse new blood into teacher curriculum decision-making.

III. Evaluating the Study

After working with ten teachers and the principals of School 1 and School 2 in this collaborative research journey, the effectiveness of the study is evaluated with reference to the significance of the study. Some emerging ideas on how this study extends theory, improves practice and informs policy about teacher curriculum decision-making are highlighted in this section.

In terms of extending theory, I (as the researcher) am informed on the one hand by the

research outcomes of the study and am therefore now more confident and competent to construct my living educational theory of teacher curriculum decision-making. The elements of my living educational theory and what it is about will be discussed in the next section. On the other hand, the research outcomes of the study (Koo, 2001b) generate four approaches to theorise teacher curriculum decision-making (see Table 1), which contribute to enrich and refine the existing body of literature about curriculum studies. The emerging ideas from a traditional approach, a humanistic approach, a democratic approach and a neo-democratic approach are discussed with respect to the purpose, process and product of teachers' curriculum work. Nevertheless, these emerging ideas in Table 1 are not generablisable across all learning sites. The major stakeholders have to consider the four approaches within the contextual complexities and distinctiveness of individual schools so that curriculum change is feasible, sensible and worthwhile for students, parents, teachers and principals.

In terms of improving practice, the four approaches to theorise teacher curriculum decision-making (see Table 1) suggest various ways and orientations of engaging teachers and principals in curriculum work. The change of approach is not so much a change of words on paper; but, a product of quantity change and quality change in ideology, ideals and actions of knowledge, curriculum and decision-making that finally transform and reconstruct teachers' curriculum work. This study was timely for the research participants to improve practice toward a neo-democratic approach to theorise teacher curriculum decision-making within a context of curriculum change. It also invites audiences/readers to reflect on the appropriate ways of improving own practice with reference to the emerging ideas from the four approaches.

In terms of informing policy about curriculum reform, the four approaches provide a credible framework for policy-makers to consider various ways of engaging teachers in curriculum decision-making. In fact this study was a pioneer inquiry about teacher curriculum decision-making within a context of curriculum change in Hong Kong. Grounded in the "real" world of teachers' curriculum work, this study recommends that policy-makers recognise that teacher curriculum decision-making theorised by a communicative view *can be* organic, generative and sustainable for change at a personal level, a classroom level and a school level.

In terms of informing policy about educational research, this study was "small" in terms of sample size. The research topic, however, was timely and thoroughly researched. The "findings" of the study were trustworthy and represented participants' authentic voices. I therefore argue that this study should be given adequate consideration so that educational policies can make better sense to the front-line teachers in terms of curriculum change. At

	Purpose	Process	Product
A Traditional Approach (A Value-Free Epistemological View)	Teachers transmit knowledge and skills; Technical interest constitutes the knowledge of teaching and learning; School curriculum is considered as value-free; Development of school programs is technical and orderly.	Teachers passively receive curriculum decisions handed down from higher authorities; Teachers work alone to confront curriculum issues and problems; Quantitative research / positivism in investigating curriculum issues and problems is prevailing.	Teaching kits and learning packages are the end-products of curriculum decision-making; Quantity change has to be ascertained; Teachers are often pressured to consider a variety of curriculum decisions because of the need for improving summative assessment results and instructional design.
A Humanistic Approach (An Existential-Ontological View)	Teachers and principals adopt a constructivist view of knowledge; Practical interest constitutes the knowledge of curriculum decision-making; School curriculum tends to focus on existential relevancy and meaningfulness; Personal values are considered in school curriculum.	Teachers question the authority of curriculum decision-making; Satisfaction of ego self is important in teachers' curriculum work; Ethnographic Research has been increasingly important.	A teacher-centered approach to curriculum planning, implementation and evaluation is adopted; Quality change becomes an agenda; School assessment encourages competition and individualism.
A Democratic Approach (A Participatory View)	Curriculum is value-laden; Teachers and principals view knowledge as socially constructed; Practical interest constitutes the knowledge of curriculum decision-making; Personal and social values have a role in school curriculum; Development of school programs needs participatory decision-making.	Curriculum collective decisions are often made by head counts; Teacher participation may be symbolic and window-dressing; and still lacks authenticity and meaning of change; Power relations and knowledge hegemony may enter into the process of curriculum decision-making; Post-structural paradigm of qualitative research may be considered.	Quality change is not possible without the engagement of the teachers' hearts and minds; Curriculum issues and problems still exist due to a pseudo-democratic practice of teacher decision-making; Teacher cooperation and group effort are required; Great demands are made on teachers' time.
A Neo-Democratic Approach (A Communicative View)	Teachers and principals share the view of knowledge-in-action; School programs are places for teachers in curriculum decision-making; Critical and emancipatory interest constitute the knowledge of curriculum decision-making; Development of school programs needs communicative actions.	Curriculum decision-making is made not by voting but reaching a consensus; Genuine sharing of ideas is a positive means to facilitate open communication and to weaken knowledge hegemony; A collaborative and professional culture contributes to create various pathways of curriculum making; Personal growth and professional learning are important ingredients for the readiness of teachers in curriculum decision-making; Collaborative Action Research, Teacher Research and Practitioner Research have a role to play.	Communicative understanding and critical reflection awaken people's hearts and create new social relations and working partnerships; Retiming, reculturing and restructuring are three important strategies for extending the potential of teachers in curriculum decision-making; Curriculum change, as a product of quantity change and quality change, is feasible, authentic and has meanings.

Table 1 Four Approaches to Theorise Teacher Curriculum Decision-Making

present, the research agendas are mostly set by education reforms rather than the reforms being framed by research findings that the policy initiatives are controversial and often contradictory to teachers' lived experiences. It also appears that research funding follows the reforms, and research seems to follow the funding. I must say that this study was *not* set by the curriculum reforms. Neither was the study directed by any research funding. This study was conducted mostly due to my curiosity and intellectual integrity. Through the study, I have found meaning for educational research and curriculum inquiry.

It is commonly accepted that this study is innovative and feasible but "small". Having said this, this study is ground-breaking in the Hong Kong culture in a way teachers and principals have not been used to. My study touched on a number of tensions which emerged as a result of my using an Action Research approach which did not, in a number of ways, fit in with the traditional perceptions of knowledge and the role of the researcher which prevail in Hong Kong and other Asian societies. One could argue that these represent aspects of a Confucian tradition and that I was experiencing these very directly, for example local research traditions, problems of self-exposure and research ethics. Thus, for western readers, what I have done may seem quite familiar; but in the Hong Kong context, to celebrate the centrality of teachers in curriculum decision-making is very much at the frontier in Hong Kong. The involvement of Critical Friends in Action Research still sounds quite unfamiliar to many local academics although there is a Chinese vocabulary with similar meaning: "諍友". The ways Critical Friends can contribute to transformation and reconstruction in curriculum change are worthy of increased attention and further investigation in the Hong Kong context given a mixed culture of east and west.

This study is thus significant because teacher curriculum decision-making provides ***a theoretical landscape*** for curriculum-rich studies in teacher education programs; consolidates ***a practical landscape*** by research-based and praxis-oriented critical inquiry from the contribution of front-line teachers and principals; and suggests ***a dialogical/dialectical landscape*** by communication and collaboration for repositioning teacher educators as researchers to fulfill a proactive, formative and challenging role in academia. The dialogical/dialectical landscape includes both the construction of a conceptual base and the establishment of a mechanism for regulating/monitoring the practice of teacher curriculum decision-making as well as the involvement of Critical Friends.

In viewing the importance of spreading awareness of the research study and its outcomes, I have presented nine referred and non-refereed conference papers for dissemination at both local and international conferences in Hong Kong (the Special Administrative Region of China), the United States, Canada and Australia. Given both academic and practitioner

audiences for the study, its impact very much relies on how successful these three landscapes together create new identities for teachers in schools and teacher educators in universities/institutions in the capacity of research possibilities and curriculum agendas.

In summary, evaluating this study envisions new possibilities for curriculum leadership actions, new spatial and territorial awareness for partnerships between schools and universities, new insights for policy-makers into authentic change in school curriculum and new positioning for teacher educators, educational researchers, teachers and principals. All this is indeed a new challenge to all of us! We expect new identities for "curriculum" and "research" in the education of 21st Century.

IV. The Road is Long: "Moving Ahead Together"

My research journey with School 1 and School 2 has come to an end. I constructed my living educational theory of teacher curriculum decision-making along the collaborative research journey. Articulating my living theory provides this study with a self-validated account. As a responsible practitioner, can I show to my own satisfaction that I have done the things I set out to do? Can I show that I have carried out a systematic inquiry, to help me live out my values more effectively than before? Can I offer a rational account of my own professional learning?

With self-validation as my intention, my living theory is based on three questions emerging from the study: "who am I?", "is my curriculum work meaningful?" and "what can I do?". Stretching these three questions around the scope of curriculum studies and educational research gives the following elements to my living theory:

- it is personal-based;
- it is dynamic and evolving;
- it is ethically-aware;
- it is research-oriented;
- it is praxis-framed;
- it is knowledge-generative; and
- it is culturally sensitive.

I believe that "identity" and "integrity" will have become two main themes of my curriculum theorising. My self-identity in curriculum work will be derived from the professional autonomy, passion and responsibility for teaching and learning. I *am* whom I am when I know:

where I come from; where am I now; and where I go from here. My integrity in curriculum decision-making will be based on my conscience, dignity and professional commitment underlying my self-identity. I *can be* a teacher curriculum decision-maker when I know: for whom should I make my curriculum decisions; in whose interests I should make them; how should I change my curriculum work in teacher education; and what is my positioning in relation to the principal, fellow colleagues, my students and other major stakeholders in transformation and reconstruction.

The identity (who I am) and the integrity (who I can be) are mutually empowering in my living educational theory of teacher curriculum decision-making. This is a new direction of my personal growth and continuous professional learning. I am confident that this can be achieved by extending my research network and working in partnerships with local and overseas academics as all of us move to a new frontier in research and teaching. Of course, all this may bring uncertainty and discomfort while we move to the unknown. What I will say is that "the road is long" and we move ahead together by celebrating diversity in unity, conflicts in harmony, and regionalisation in globalisation.

To me, the new research direction is to "go wider" in teacher curriculum decision-making by the inclusion of parents, students and the community in Hong Kong; and to "go deeper" in investigating about teachers in curriculum leadership actions. I have accepted this challenge with an open heart and mind. In fact, it is because of my wonderful experiences in this study that I will move in the new directions with confidence and commitment.

V. Conclusion

Given the reliable evidence of the study's effectiveness, this study is rigorous and significantly innovative in Hong Kong. The collaboration with the teachers and principals for effective curriculum change was in alignment with the goal of teacher education as "bridging the gap". The impact in terms of cutting edge developments and sustainability is feasible because the ways of assessing and disseminating the research outcomes have been thoroughly considered in the design and implementation of the study.

Moreover, this study is appropriate and useful for policy-makers to rethink teachers' curriculum work within a context of curriculum change. There are some conditions for this to happen. Firstly, one single study cannot change the world! It is rather important for research communities to join together to have a strong voice about their research "findings". Secondly, educational researchers are free from the research traditions and the interest of government

funding but free *to* choose appropriate methodologies and set the research agendas for the public good. Thirdly, researchers are committed to exploring new frontiers in research methodologies and research partnerships with other agencies or institutions across the working fields. Fourthly, researchers do not see the first three conditions as painting a picture of romance or utopian desires but as a lived reality with contest and confrontation. I would say that all this ***is*** a paradoxical challenge to the university academics to live with critically in order to improve the quality output of educational research.

The future is in our hands. Let us take that challenge together and keep our promise to make curriculum change a lived reality in Hong Kong. This is the message of HOPE with which this study would conclude.

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